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ABSTRACT

The process of making better people managers was examined. Data were collected through interviews with managers and staff at five case study organizations in the United Kingdom and through interviews with a sample of business schools and management developers. The study established that managers must be able to do the following things: (1) empower and develop others; (2) manage morale and performance; (3) work across boundaries, engage with others, work as part of a team, and think differently about problems and their solutions; (4) focus on internal and external customers; and (4) balance technical and generic skills. Management development providers and managers agreed that people management skills are becoming increasingly necessary. The following management development programs were identified as being particularly effective: (1) a coaching program for middle managers from a government department; (2) a transformational management development program in a health authority; and (3) a carefully developed and nurtured culture in a medium-sized manufacturing company. Twin tracks to better people management were identified. The first is to develop managers so that they can in turn change the culture of management within the organizations, and the second is to try to act directly on the culture of the organization and expectations of managers as a lever to change managers' behavior. (Contains 25 references.) (MN)

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Executive Summary

UK management is not up to snuff – that is the message emerging from government. Concerns over UK productivity have resurfaced, a report on management and leadership (CEML, 2002) has looked carefully at the evidence of what the UK needs to do to improve and the government has engaged the services of Michael Porter to explore how the UK can improve competitiveness, including the role of UK managers.

In this research we have focused on the vital 'people bit' of the management job. We have also focused on the often neglected junior and middle managers, from their own perspective, that of the employees they manage and some of the key providers of management development activity. We have sought to find answers to the question of just how do organisations create enthusiastic people managers with an interest in people and the skills to develop and motivate them?

The skill challenge

The skill demands made of managers are changing. Pushed and pulled by a variety of different forces, they are increasingly expected to be able to envision change and create strategy (in the face of growing uncertainty); to be able to design new ways of working that help meet these visions; manage the process of change so that morale and motivation are maintained; and to do all this and keep their eye firmly on current performance.

To do all this they need a range of skills:

- the ability to empower and develop others – understanding and practising the need to deliver through the capability and autonomy of others

- managing morale and performance – different sectors and organisations will require different ways of nurturing staff relationships but all are demanding. Managers increasingly need to maintain morale whilst also maximising performance.
- being able to work across boundaries, engaging with others, able to work as a member of a team, thinking differently about problems and their solutions
- developing relationship with and a focus on the customer, building partnerships and relationships with both internal and external customers
- demonstrating the ability to balance technical and generic skills – managers are increasingly expected to balance the management of human relationships with an understanding of some of the more technical aspects of management and a good understanding of their organisational context.

The providers' perspective

Providers have seen the demand for people management skills development grow, but also observe that the genuine commitment to these issues varies by sector. Manufacturing and high-tech companies have truly listened to the message; professional partnerships and retail may have only heard it.

They have seen that the fundamental issues that need to be addressed do not change much; managing performance, managing change, managing teams and managing motivation – but the words or phrases that are important to use to attract people to programmes do shift. They are currently: 'coaching', 'conflict' and 'leadership'.

Some of the delivery trends pose specific problems in terms of developing people management skills of a large population. The move to tailored and personal development that has been so prevalent in the senior management population is often too expensive to roll out widely, and e-learning may not be able to deal with some of the subtleties and complexities of people skills.

The managers' perspective

Managers are often acutely aware of conflicts between various expectations organisations have of them. They feel torn between

hard and soft management styles – the pressure to demonstrate excellent soft skills to maintain morale, develop high levels of commitment and motivation and to develop others to their full potential may sit in stark contrast to the demands on increasing output, on dealing with poor performance, and on hitting stretching targets. They also feel stuck in the middle between senior managers espousing a leadership style that they do not always deliver in practice, and junior staff who may feel antagonistic to the senior team and want and expect support from their manager. Finally, managers may feel torn between focusing on the current situation or looking longer-term to the future. A longer-term focus may persuade managers to spend more time developing staff and providing work experience that they will find challenging, a shorter-term focus may persuade them to do the work themselves.

Managers and their subordinates have a distinctive view of what good management looks like. They characterise good managers as *being connected* with an understanding and commitment to the organisation, to the customer, to the community and to colleagues. They are also *interested in people*, see their staff as individuals and are interested in them and how they are doing, keen to share information and celebrate success. They also don't shy away from difficult situations and *manage performance and conflict* by dealing with marginal performance or unacceptable behaviour quickly. Good managers act as *change agents* within their areas of responsibility, they make things happen, they seek the ways and means of improving things and of challenging what is taken for granted. They do these things whilst also being *democratic and empowering*, delegating well, challenging and supporting people. Finally they are *true to themselves*, acting with integrity, believing what they say, holding personal values that support their behaviour.

Organisational practice

How do organisations get stuck into the reality of finding ways of dealing with these challenges? For many, they do the sensible thing and instigate a management development programme or two, designed to address some of the issues being faced, to provide some of the skills needed and to create some new relationships in the process. Just occasionally, organisations do something that is a little more risky and more visionary. We saw

three examples in the course of this research that were extra-ordinary:

- a coaching programme for middle managers from a government department
- a transformational management development programme in a health authority
- a carefully developed and nurtured culture in a medium sized manufacturing company.

Each of these examples was very different in the way they chose to address people management capability, but all had significant impact through structures that provided support, insight and challenge. In this report we describe each of them in some detail.

Twin tracks to better people management

When organisations want to improve management capability, they have two distinct choices in ways to encourage managers to become better. They can:

1. develop their managers so that they can in turn change the culture of management within the organisation
2. try to act directly on the culture of the organisation and expectations of managers, as a lever to change the behaviour of managers.

Developing managers

Those approaches to development that focused on the individual, worked because they looked at the innermost attributes of the individual. Changing soft skills behaviour requires impacting on the inner layers of human attributes and allows for a movement from external knowledge – what the programme tells you, an internalising of it, what it tells you about yourself, an understanding of what you are going to need to do differently and how to support that and, finally, a change in behaviour (see Figure 6.2).

Making these transitions needs feedback, an awareness of where you are relative to where you want to be, best delivered in a supportive environment that makes receiving feedback less painful and producing less anxiety. With this combination,

managers' confidence can be raised, which makes them more likely to learn, and apply what they have learnt in practice.

The successful programmes also took considerable efforts to ensure that the learning was relevant and firmly based in the work environment of the manager, that it was sustained over time by building energy and enthusiasm, or by offering ongoing support, and that it touched upon many rather than a few.

Leveraging culture

Using culture to change behaviour and to sustain that change is no easy option. It has to battle against some common traits adopted by people – the avoidance of confrontation, the desire to save face (our own and others), and to act to suppress honesty and limit feedback. Maintaining a healthy culture means promoting it at every opportunity, *ie* through communication, reward, performance management, selection decisions *etc*. It needs support from senior people who commit to it fully, live it, and encourage everyone else to do the same.

In reality, these are unlikely to be contrasting alternatives, either utilising development to shift the culture of management within the organisation, or utilising organisational culture to create an appropriate environment for development. It is likely to be that success depends on neither one nor the other, but elements of both. Management learning is one element of creating better management, supported by the creation of a sympathetic organisational culture.

1. Introduction

1.1 Managers and leaders — the 'people bit' of the job

The issue of how managers and leaders deal with the 'people bit' of their jobs is one of the biggest challenges facing organisations and the managers who work for them.

At national level, the DTI is increasingly interested in whether poor leadership and management lie at the heart of the UK's relatively poor productivity. A major national enquiry, under the umbrella of the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership, has spent two years examining the evidence on what the UK needs to do to improve the quality of its managers (CEML, 2002 and the government's response DfES and DTI (2002). In both this investigation and the earlier work of the national Skills Task Force (DfEE, 2000), management skills emerge as a significant skills gap for the UK. Most of the aspects of management that are mentioned as skill problems are those which involve managers as leaders of people, especially the ability to manage performance, to motivate staff and to lead others through change.

The same concern is reflected in the many discussions – both formal and informal – which IES has had with HR managers, business leaders, and training and development specialists. Business leaders often see middle managers as 'the problem' – failing to deal with poor performers and resisting change. Middle managers, of course, see senior managers as the problem – failing to role model the people behaviours they are espousing in statements of 'values'.

HR orthodoxy, over at least the past ten years, has emphasised the need for line managers to take the primary responsibility for the staff they manage. Personnel departments have backed off from much of the day-to-day work of dealing with people issues (Tamkin *et al.*, 1997). Line managers are now in the front line of staff planning, recruitment, performance management, staff development, pay, career development and communications.

This report therefore focuses on the 'people bit' of the management job. It reviews how some organisations approach the improvement of people management skills. We examine this issue from the perspectives of HR managers, line managers at various levels, the employees they manage and some providers of management development services.

1.2 The research

IES conducted case study research to obtain these varied perspectives on people management and how the general population of managers can be helped to manage people better.

The research team visited five organisations and interviewed management development experts, senior managers, line managers themselves and their staff. We have also engaged with other organisations through a number of workshops on the theme of management development, and have interviewed a sample of business schools and management developers about their experiences.

1.2.1 Organisation case studies

In each of the case studies, we spoke with senior HR people with a view of the organisation, those responsible for management development, managers themselves, senior managers, and employees. Each of the interviewees was asked about:

1. the ways in which it developed people
2. the impact of management development
3. the expectations of how performance was managed
4. the ways in which managers were supported in their role, and
5. those things that were barriers to better people management, both individually and organisationally.

1.2.2 Management development providers

Those who provide management development are in a good position to see both how organisations define the 'people management' part of the manager's job and the challenges that individual managers face in delivering this. Telephone interviews were conducted with six major management colleges and business schools.

They were asked:

1. how the people management part of the line manager's job is defined by employing organisations, and whether this definition has been changing
2. how line managers themselves are responding to the people management part of their jobs, and which parts of this remit they see as particularly difficult to deliver
3. how, as suppliers, they are training line managers as people managers, and whether their approaches are changing.

1.3 Report structure

In the rest of this report we look at the experiences of providers and our case studies, some of the tensions that emerge from this research, and our conclusions as to what success might look like. The chapters each take a different perspective on the 'people management' issue.

Chapter 2 examines the literature on the business drivers for changing approaches to management, and leads on to identifying the factors seen as central to 'leadership.' Previous IES research is used to highlight some of the challenges for those charged with developing better people managers.

Chapter 3 reports on the interviews with external providers of management development. How do they see the challenges of people management and how these skills can best be enhanced?

Chapter 4 summarises the organisational perspective through the case studies of management development practice. In each case, we look at the context for the intervention, what was done and its impact.

Chapter 5 takes the perspective of the individual manager, mainly through the interviews with managers in the case study organisations. As others argue over what skills they need, what they are bad at and what they need to be better at, how do managers see these issues for themselves?

In Chapter 6, strategies for raising the people management skills of the management population are compared. In particular, we examine the choice between skill-led change and a culture-led approach.

Finally, in Chapter 7, we conclude with the key messages from the study.

2. The Skill Challenge of People Management

In this chapter we look at why people management is becoming ever more important, how it might be characterised, and the challenges for those seeking to develop better people managers.

2.1 The business demand for better managers

There are a number of business drivers all placing increasing demands on the management population in organisations. These include:

- increased competition
- new technology
- changing demand
- legislation
- shifting organisational structures.

Competition is most obvious in global industries or markets, where managers in other countries may be achieving higher productivity levels than in the UK. But competition also manifests itself through the other drivers. For example, new technology provides the ability to do things differently, to offer something that no-one else can or, at the very least, keep up with what everyone else is doing. In some sectors, such as telecommunications, it is the fuel of their industry. In others, it has completely refreshed a longstanding traditional product, whilst in others it speeds up service delivery or reduces costs. Pressures to deploy new technologies effectively, are just as important in the public sector as the private sector.

Changing demand is another commonly reported pressure for change. For some this is expressed as changing customer requirements, or more starkly, more demanding customers. Changing customer pressure puts a direct onus on managers to respond.

Legislation also changes the business context. Some legislation has acted to deregulate markets and increase competition; other legislation acts to regulate for consumer protection (for example in financial services).

Structural change in organisations is one response to external pressures, which itself makes demands on managers. Such change may be aimed at streamlining organisations to save costs or add competitive value. Mergers and acquisitions have been prevalent over the past five years and have brought large-scale change to many organisations. They apply in the public sector as well as the private sector – to health trusts and colleges as well as global companies. Partnership working (PPP and business alliances, and working with outsourced suppliers) is another feature of the shifting organisational landscape.

What all these business drivers have in common is that they put managers in the front line of change by making demands on them in several ways. Managers at a range of levels need to be able to:

- imagine how the business can change itself to respond to pressures and succeed – often called 'visioning' or strategy formulation
- design new ways of working which implement these visions
- manage the process of change itself, and especially keep staff motivated along the way, even when job cuts are involved
- do all this without letting current performance slip.

Most of these demands, especially those about implementing change and motivating others, put particular pressure on managers' ability to deal with the people they manage.

2.2 The leadership debate and how people should be led

Many of these concerns have surfaced in the so-called leadership debate in the UK. One device used by many authors and commentators is to use the word 'management' for the more procedural elements of the manager's job and the more exciting word 'leadership' for those aspects that reflect the greater challenges of management. This is not really very useful as it carries with it confusion about hierarchical level. In spite of endless statements to the effect that organisations need leaders at all levels (which is true to some extent), the word 'leadership' still carries with it connotations of people near the top of the organisation. The leadership debate can be seen to devalue people called 'managers' ('leadership is good, management is bad') and to imply that there may be people in leadership jobs whose role different from that of the people we have called managers.

All these confusions aside, we should look at the characteristics ascribed to 'leaders', because they do capture the changing nature of the people management challenge.

The common capabilities ascribed to 'leaders' include the ability to:

- create a sense of vision in a fast changing environment
- motivate teams of people and lead them through change
- innovate in products and services and ways of working.

We can see current ideas of leadership as evolving from a number of strands over a long period of time. Bass (1985) described a 'transformational' manager (as opposed to the more procedural 'transactional' manager). Transformational behaviour includes the notions of vision, motivation and innovation. The idea of 'empowerment' has also been important, seen by Argyris (1998) as signifying a more motivational management style, achieved through more involvement and leading to higher employee commitment.

2.3 People skills needed by managers

IES forum debates held over the past couple of years have collected organisational views of what managers need to be good at. These skills include:

- the ability to look ahead, to see the 'big picture' and deal with relationships (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 1999)
- teamworking, including the ability to work in teams that stretch across organisational boundaries (Colvin, 1998). This is especially challenging in complex situations, for example in mergers or business alliances (Garrow *et al.*, 2000).
- a broad understanding of business, including global issues and competitor organisations
- being able to see what technology can do to improve performance
- dealing well with change themselves, as well as being change agents for others. This is linked with self-reliance and resilience (Hiltrop, 1998) and the recently fashionable idea of 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1996).
- another way of looking at dealing with change is through continuous learning and therefore the meta skill of 'learning to learn' (Winterton *et al.*, 2000) and attributes such as resilience.

In terms of what managers need in relation to dealing with people – the main focus of this report – some of the skills we would prioritise include:

- the ability to empower and develop others
- managing morale and performance
- being able to work across boundaries
- the relationship with, and focus on, the customer
- the ability to balance technical and generic skills.

2.3.1 Empowerment and development

For managers, there is a shift from manager as controller to manager as coach and mentor. Managers are expected to encourage workers to take greater responsibility for their own management and the management of the task or service.

Managers are also expected to develop people to take on this widened role.

Managing resources is also key, as the demand for services in many areas is constantly increasing, with no commensurate increase in the resources available. Managers are expected to be able to provide strategic leadership, and to work and think in more creative ways. Throughout the organisation, there is increasingly a need to make decisions at a lower level as resources are tightened.

2.3.2 Morale and performance

All sectors need managers who are good with people, whether those people are the product experts who need to be nurtured and kept, or low-skilled staff who need support, training and motivational skills to maintain productivity in frequently difficult work climates.

In many sectors, managers also lack skills in performance management and consequently, poor performance of both managers and staff is not addressed. Generally there is less space to tolerate sub-standard performance, and therefore managers need to be able to deal with conflict and have the difficult conversation, or to deal with misbehaviour when it arises. With all these pressures, providing a sense of continuity, belonging and a sense of purpose, can help workforces deal with change.

2.3.3 Cross-boundary working

In all organisations, individuals and managers increasingly have to engage positively with others, work as a team, think more about what they are doing, consider the customer, innovate, work with diversity, negotiate, persuade and lead.

'Joined-up' working (a major thrust in the public sector) requires greater project management skills and awareness of the issues that cut across the boundaries of professional expertise. This requires intellectual breadth and open-mindedness. As a result of such changes, there needs to be much greater emphasis on working in teams, and partnership.

2.3.4 Customer focus

Many organisations are moving to be much more responsive to the customer. This requires enhanced customer care skills and increasingly, the ability to work with the customer in partnership.

The emphasis on customer care, has led to a need for customer facing staff to develop problem solving skills and the soft skills of building and managing relationships. Managers have to develop these skills in others but also in themselves, as they manage relationships and partnerships with both internal and external customers.

2.3.5 Balancing the technical and the generic

There is considerable evidence that managers increasingly need to balance the management of human relationships, with a deep technical understanding of the other aspects of management. Kettley and Strebler (1997) for example, stressed the need for the soft skills of motivation, empowerment and relationship building with somewhat harder abilities in focusing the organisation on its strategic priorities and recognising the interdependencies when managing change. They found emerging skill gaps in the growing imbalance of technical versus generic management skills and interpersonal empathy. The future requirements identified included focusing on strategic priorities, relationship building, and motivating for performance improvements.

2.4 A challenge for managers and their developers

These needs for people skills have been accelerated by the shift of responsibility for personnel management from a specialist HR function to every line manager. This shift may have been useful in getting managers to believe that they really need to attend to the people who report to them. It may have been less useful in sometimes abruptly removing from managers a source of expert advice on how to manage particular people or situations. Later in this report (Chapter 5) we will see that some particular aspects of managing people still cause line managers considerable anxiety. Hence, they sometimes see people management as a 'chore' when they are being asked to be people 'champions'.

HR, and training and development experts also face considerable challenges in knowing how to develop these people skills in more managers. A recent IES review of trends in management development (Hirsh and Carter, 2002) identified the following challenges for those helping to develop better managers:

- the need to focus management development on organisational priorities and to provide a sense of coherence
- reconciling the development needs of individual managers with those of the organisation
- delivering development in ways that are effective for management learning
- the challenge of extending more experiential and personal forms of development from small groups of senior managers to the whole management population
- the changing roles of trainers and of line managers in the area of management development
- influencing the learning culture of an organisation
- practical approaches to evaluating the impact of management development.

Each of these challenges applies to the 'people management' skills agenda. For example, is it more important to help managers develop and empower, or to deal with poor performers? Can coaching, often thought to be effective in helping senior managers deal better with people, be extended to much larger populations of junior or middle managers? Should trainers themselves become coaches or outsource the development of better people skills to training providers, business schools or e-learning packages?

3. The Providers' Perspective

As part of the research, we interviewed a number of providers of management development. These included business schools that were part of a higher education institution, independent centres, and in-company management developers. In this chapter the term 'providers' will be used as shorthand for all of these.

This chapter examines their experience of what employers are asking for in terms of developing 'people managers', and how such development can best be delivered.

3.1 What providers see employers as asking for

In thinking about how organisations go about developing their main body of managers, we asked providers what they saw as the key demands.

3.1.1 People management increasingly important

Although employers have talked about the importance of people management for many years, providers do see this aspect of management as increasingly important to employers when it comes to management development programmes.

Gaining the commitment and motivation of employees is seen as central to achieving high organisational performance. Better people management skills in line management are seen as the primary lever for achieving this. For some organisations, staff retention is also a driver.

Although the interest in people management is strong, providers still see major differences between organisations, in the extent to which an interest in the management of people has become embedded and is seen as a genuinely important part of every manager's role. Providers felt that manufacturing and high-tech companies had absorbed the importance of people management to a greater degree than professional partnerships or more labour-intensive sectors such as retail. They also found international differences in what people management implied.

3.1.2 Leadership and interpersonal skills

The term 'leadership' is increasingly used by employers to capture some particularly important aspects of people management. Leadership certainly places a strong emphasis on interpersonal skills (especially those of motivation and leadership through change), but is also seen as related to what is going on inside the manager, and their personal qualities. Such leadership capabilities for senior managers are often expressed in terms of competencies.

Leadership is also increasingly important at middle and junior management levels, although here is it less clear whether employers have articulated what they really expect from managers.

3.1.3 Specific aspects of people management

There were common themes in the language used by providers to describe the more specific aspects of people management required by employers. These are shown in Figure 3.1.

The four strongest themes are around:

1. performance management
2. leading change
3. managing teams
4. motivation.

These link with more specific skills being sought in development programmes:

Figure 3.1: Skills of people managers as identified by development providers

Source: IES, 2003

- Managing poor performance is a key challenge for managers.
- Improved selection and promotion is seen as one way of avoiding poor performance and is now often a direct responsibility of the line.
- The role of the manager as coach is seen as a key both to increasing performance and motivation.
- Facilitation skills are often mentioned, especially in the context of working with project teams and 'virtual' teams.
- Innovation is seen as part of the change agenda.

Diversity is an issue in many organisations. In the private sector the debate is more focused on the impact of international cultures, whilst the public sector tends to focus on gender and ethnicity issues within the UK.

3.2 Trends in delivering development in people management skills

Where organisations were most likely to use a management college or business schools, it is interesting to note that most of the providers said they were mainly involved in delivering management development to fairly senior managers.

Although some of the providers have been training managers in interpersonal skills for over 25 years, some particular words or phrases can be important in reflecting the 'spin' that needs to be put on people management for courses to be attractive at a particular time. Buzzwords that are popular at present include 'coaching', 'conflict' and 'leadership'.

In terms of how organisations are meeting their needs for such training, providers see the following trends:

- Open courses are valued for the networking and benchmarking opportunities they present.
- In-company tailored courses are a faster growing market. Companies want programmes that can be set up very quickly and to meet specific needs.
- There have been some very successful consortium programmes where several employers share a tailored course, but these remain few in number as they are relatively slow and time consuming to set up.
- Companies and their managers are looking for training methods that focus on the practical skills of people management (*eg* group work and one-to-one support), and which include real examples from other organisations, and vivid experiences (*eg* use of film).
- These tailored and personal forms of learning are quite expensive to provide and are purchased mainly for senior managers or younger managers considered to be 'high potential'.
- By contrast, there is also growth in short, focused modules to address the management basics. These tend to be delivered in-company, sometimes through corporate universities or e-learning.
- Management programmes use 360 degree feedback as a powerful way of giving managers much richer feedback on how they are seen by others. It is a particularly effective tool for supporting the development of people management skills.
- Management colleges and business schools are looking at how best to use e-learning to support management development in general, and in developing people management skills in particular. E-learning in this area is used for diagnostics before the event (*eg* self-assessment of skills), some information (*eg* background reading) and support after a learning event (*eg* chat-rooms or email support).

3.3 Issues identified by providers

The providers interviewed obviously respond to these trends in what they sell. As researchers and reflective practitioners they also raised some issues in relation to developing people management skills.

- Organisations still have a long way to go in embedding positive attitudes into people management. Training courses can improve skills but may not change attitudes. Senior role models are seen as especially important in influencing real attitudes.
- Young high-flying managers are not always interested in improving their people skills. They either think they have them already, or believe that learning about business strategy and finance are more important issues for them. Older managers are more deeply aware of the importance of handling people well.
- Companies sometimes use education and training (*eg* sponsored MBAs) as a reward or to try and keep someone in the organisation who might otherwise leave. This can distort management development provision.
- There is a real challenge in the teaching of people management in balancing conceptual inputs with skill practice. Such practical work changes the role of the tutor from teacher to facilitator and coach. It is also expensive to provide, and demands face-to-face contact rather than distance learning methods.
- Such participative and personal approaches to people skills are now a major component of senior management training, but it is difficult to find cost effective ways of extending such learning opportunities to the larger populations of middle and junior managers.
- Major companies are looking for approaches they can deliver globally, albeit with some recognition of varying country cultures.
- Some of the providers raised more contentious issues. One confessed that it is hard to tell whether trends in management development are demand led (*ie* because of what companies need) or supply led (*ie* because of what providers choose to put on offer). Another questioned the extent to which organisations load all aspects of people management onto the immediate line manager. 'Are we simply asking too much of the line? '

4. Case Studies of Organisational Practice

We visited six organisations for this research, primarily those that were doing something different, either in terms of a development programme or in terms of the systems and processes they had in place to create better management. We wanted them to have given some thought as to how they could make the bulk of their managers better, rather than their activities for the elite few.

Our case studies approached the issue of creating better managers from very different perspectives. For one it was through a coherent management development programme, another set up an executive coaching programme, another created a company culture in which people management skills were of enormous significance and for the others there was some degree of experimenting with a number of alternatives. In this chapter we briefly review the approaches of the case study organisations.

4.1 A management development programme

North Western Health Board (a large public sector health provider based in the North West of Eire) has been looking to transform the culture of the organisation. The organisation was characterised by having large numbers of multi-disciplinary staff, spread over a wide geographical area and with increasing service demands coupled with cost constraints. The culture of the organisation was described as not being conducive to management development and with some negative characteristics such as:

- selection by seniority
- little evidence of a management culture
- little challenge
- change resistant
- suspicious, distrusting
- functionally isolated
- poor emphasis on development.

4.1.1 The intervention

The organisation chose to use a development programme to try and turn this situation around. The programme had certain features that were probably important in making sense of this ambition. For one thing, at 12 months it was a long programme. It also had considerable formal input:

- five-day residential
- action learning sets
- projects
- workshops
- cohort meetings.

These elements of the programme were used to facilitate certain activities. The programme was deliberately structured to encourage individuals to explore self, initially through the start-up workshop and then supported by the creation of learning sets. These provide feedback and help individuals make sense of the feedback from others. The sets also provide a structure within which people commit to action, give managers practice at managing meetings to time and explicit outcomes, provide a vehicle to create relationships across organisational boundaries, and encourage them to think of the perspectives of others. The projects and the work of a set, encourages individuals to be more creative in thinking through solutions, to take more risks and to challenge and stretch themselves within their jobs. The underlying belief is that everyone can do something to make the area they work in more efficient or to deliver a better customer experience. The projects provide the vehicle to do so, the sets provide the support and the programme provides the impetus and the relevant skills to enable managers to make the change.

4.1.2 Impact

As a consequence of this development experience, managers believed that they were working quite differently. Managers described themselves as stepping back from the role more and becoming more strategic about management. They tended to delegate much more to their staff rather than trying to do it all themselves, and managed their time better. This was one of the things that many had wanted to work on when they entered the programme, acknowledging that time is heavily pressured in the work environment. An element of this time management capability was a growing assertiveness and the ability to say no to colleagues and more senior managers, who wanted work done. Some had always felt guilty over delegating to their staff but found that in fact, staff welcomed the additional responsibility. Managers were also involving their staff and communicating with them much more, engaging them in change and decision making. Several had introduced processes to involve teams more, through meetings, team days *etc.*

On a more personal level, participants spoke of growing self-confidence and self-belief. This was evident in a rise in job applications and promotions amongst programme participants. Others found themselves allowing greater humanity at work, connecting at a much more personal level, rather than holding themselves aloof from their staff.

Subordinates' comments on the changes in their managers were remarkably positive. They also highlighted improved delegation skills and better people management skills, that had made considerable difference to the way work was done.

> *'She was always management oriented, but she is now more able to control difficult situations, she tries to find the background of why the situation has arisen, gets the facts and makes others more aware of what she is doing.'*

> *'We have lots of staff shortages, and my manager was doing a lot of clinical work, my manager is now more inclined to delegate and thinks how time can be saved.'*

There were also mentions of improved interpersonal skills:

'Her style has changed, she talks more to people, is more understanding and finds out more about people. She would have walked over people in the past. She's now more tolerant.'

'I've had two managers who have completed. It had much more impact on one than the other, one was more able to ask for things and make a case for change, they were very positive about it. But for the other person it had unbelievable impact, she is totally different, you can speak to her now. She used to be very insular, and although we all knew she had personal problems, she would never speak about it which meant you felt you couldn't go to her if you had problems too. She manages conflict much better now, whereas before it was never sorted. There has been a vast improvement —really brilliant.'

'He is more approachable now, he used to sit with the other managers over lunch but now comes and sit with us, he will speak to anyone, he asks if he is giving enough work and shows concern over our workload.'

Some subordinates drew attention to more work-focused changes in their managers, changes in the way the job is done. These were often the outcomes of the projects:

'The project is in some ways making her more work-focused, collating elderly people's records to assess whether they are at risk and how we can stop them coming in to hospital.'

'There is definitely an improvement, he is more of a shaper, and decision maker. He is out of his office more and talking to patients. He set up a project to educate relatives how they can help and this has made staff jobs easier. He looked at the environment and got it painted so it looks much nicer. He is much more engaged in the development of staff, and gives more courses to staff.'

Senior managers' views were also positive. They saw the programme as encouraging a journey of self-discovery, resulting in considerable maturity and developing resilience to disappointment and set-backs.

'All have grown in stature —it is a wonderful experience.'

'All have become more structured in their approach to work and more serious, less disorganised. They value themselves much more highly, and see their role as more important.'

They also saw it as helping to change the culture of the organisation from static, stuck within its comfort zone, suspicious, distrusting and with active resistance to change, to a much more open and fluid organisation.

4.2 Executive coaching programme

Another case also showed a high-input, personal development programme that was well received by those undertaking it. This programme was provided for middle managers by the (then) Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR), a large central government, policy-based department. At the point at which we visited the organisation, it had just been through major restructuring and there was a belief that it needed some support to embed a new vision and sense of identity. The specific need for a coaching programme emerged from an IiP assessment which commented that the progress towards IiP had reached a certain level in the organisation and had then lost clarity and momentum. There was a view that stronger management skills were needed at team leader level, where traditionally, individuals had been promoted for their policy skills rather than managerial ability. There needed to be greater recognition of the role conflict in the transition from leaders of teams, managers of resources, strategists preparing for the long-term and advisors. There was common agreement that a shift towards leadership and management was needed. The coaching programme was carefully chosen from a range of possibilities to avoid any negative messages associated with 'sheep dip' training, and to provide some positive support and commitment to individuals.

4.2.1 The intervention

The programme was based on one to one support provided by executive coaches, some from within the organisation but others from outside. This had certain characteristics in common with the development programme above: it contained a 360 degree feedback session, a supportive learning environment and it focused on job and role. These elements all helped managers to focus on what they wanted to change, and to work with an assigned learning coach to make it happen.

The DTLR provided four coaching sessions within the programme. The programme began with a 360 degree feedback process, which formed the basis of discussion for the first meeting. The next meeting followed soon after (normally within six to eight weeks) to consider what to do next. There were then two further follow-up meetings, one of which was designed as a role definition meeting, sometimes with the line manager, and the sessions ended with an evaluation meeting around six months from the beginning of the process.

4.2.2 Impact

The coaching programme was distinguished by strong views of change by those who were undertaking the programme, and much more diluted impressions from those around the individual. Participants felt that they had gained considerably from the 360 degree feedback element enabling them to focus on the aspects of their behaviour that they wished to change. Another major advantage of the programme was the opportunity to step back from the job and reflect on what they did — the kind of space and opportunity that was rarely available in the pressures of the organisation. The combination of these two elements provided participants the chance to learn more about themselves and the ways in which they came across to others, and to think more consciously about their strengths and weaknesses.

> *'I learnt about my own strengths and weaknesses and what to concentrate on, I have formed long-term goals to make conscious what is unconscious.'*

> *'I did a lot of self-analysis based on the 360 and now get a better understanding of what people expect from me, I feel I could do more to see things from others' perspective'.*

Changes in work-based behaviour were also reported by participants, who felt that they listened more to others, engaged them more, and were more flexible in their approach to others.

> *'I'm more interested in my people and try to break the day up more and have more regular interaction.'*

> *'I listen more to what people are saying and what they are feeling, and I ask them what they feel. As a result the team is more cohesive and a more effective team. I do more delegating, and less direction.'*

The learning can be quite personal, including understanding that you may come across in ways that you did not appreciate:

> *'I tend to be blunt, and found I need to adjust and be more flexible, I'm learning to trust people and let others do their job.'*

On the whole, participants described the changes as slight and subtle. Perhaps because the nature of the change was less dramatic than that articulated in the North Western Health board programme, the visibility of this change by others was also less. Subordinates commented that their managers were overloaded, with too little time for their staff, and there had been no visible change in this.

4.3 Creating a unique culture

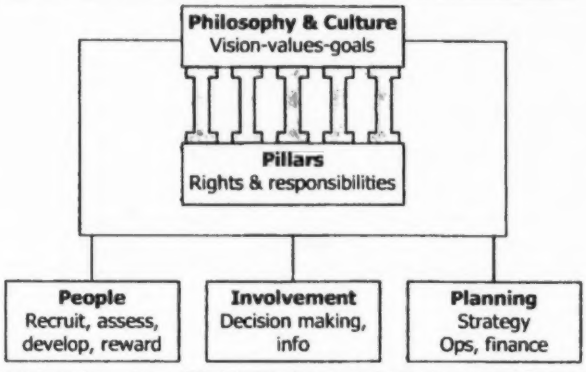
In another case study, we had a vivid example of how the culture of an organisation was used as a tool to embed better people management. This case study was Sportasia , an SME operating in the clothing industry in the North East of the UK.

Sportasia was formed in 1988 by two friends who wanted to create a working environment that could positively affect people, and in doing so, bring growth and prosperity. The choice of leisure clothing as the focus of their business was secondary to their desire to create an organisation where the driving force was the development of people.

4.3.1 The intervention

The most striking thing about this organisation was its unique culture. This was reflected in its rationale or mission, which was to enhance the lives of its employees. It also had a very distinct and articulated philosophy embodied in the term 'the community company'. Sportasia recognised that its philosophy and culture were of key significance. It recognised that the main responsibility for setting the cultural tone lay with its leaders, but the establishment of a clearly defined business culture requires the majority of individuals within the organisation to subscribe to its philosophy. The creating and maintaining of a culture requires genuine commitment by the organisation's leaders. It requires constant nurturing and attention, and needs to be underpinned by identifying the elements of culture, *ie* those

Figure 4.1: Sportasia's articulation of Philosophy and Culture



Source: Sportasia, 2002

supporting ideas and beliefs that would critically affect the organisation's ability to preserve culture if they were no longer evident.

There are a number of strands to Sportasia's philosophy (see Figure 4.1):

- **Freedom of expression** and the involvement individuals require to shape their lives and careers. The organisation believes that it relies on individual growth to drive its own progression and supports people in their development.
- **Respect and tolerance**. Whilst recognition is given to the different levels of responsibility that people have within the organisation, respect is accorded equally, regardless of rank or hierarchy.
- **Reward** is distributed on the basis of notions of fairness and decency. The reward structure is designed to recognise that the prosperity of the organisation is derived from the efforts of everyone, and that all should benefit fairly from the wealth created by the community.
- **Recognition** is an important element of people feeling valued and to ensure that contributions are acknowledged.
- The philosophy of the community company is underpinned by **rights** and **responsibilities** — mutual expectations that support the culture and provide the impetus for community activity.

These articulated elements form the pillars (the critical values and beliefs that support culture) and if removed, would be likely to result in the weakening or collapse of the culture. They are articulated in six areas:

1. information and involvement
2. fair rewar l
3. shared prosperity
4. employment protection
5. application of values
6. development opportunity.

For example, under information and involvement, individuals have the right to information and to be involved in the development of future strategy and the direction of the community. They also have the right to be involved in decision making on operational issues that affect them. The complementary responsibility is a commitment to dealing with concerns about any aspect of the working community in an open and honest manner. Similarly, shared prosperity brings the right to share in the profits of the company through profit-share and share ownership. Profit-share is not determined by salary. The relevant responsibility is that individuals need to look beyond their own needs and roles and apply their effort and thoughts to the community.

These rights and responsibilities are underpinned by a set of values that represent the essence of the organisation's culture. Sportasia expressly believes:

- its people are its greatest strength
- in valuing all people equally
- in a commitment to excellence
- in teamwork and humour
- in commitment to personal development
- in the value of listening
- that it exists through delivering a caring service built around our customers needs.

4.3.2 Impact

Management capability in Sportasia is the product of several things. It is partly the result of the culture of the organisation, partly the result of management development activity and partly an outcome of the performance management systems and processes. There is plenty of support for more junior management people in, for example, dealing with any difficult issues and if necessary, the personnel manager runs conflict resolution meetings.

As a consequence of this culture and other interventions to do with management development, managers felt that the organisation and they themselves were always focused on solutions, and always dealt with problems with people as they arose. They described the culture as very people-centred, engaging with staff at all levels and, as a consequence, staff were fully involved in the organisation and would work very hard for it, including unpaid evening and weekend working when needed.

Staff views tended to support this. They stated that managers always took an interest in the people, that they were encouraged to go to their manager with queries and requests and that managers were more approachable than in other organisations they had worked in.

> *'Managers are encouraged to be concerned, if you're quiet they will ask what's up, and will check out what it is.'*
>
> *'You are encouraged to go to your manager, and they will take time to listen. They are never too busy and will come back with comments.'*
>
> *'This organisation is different as managers listen to you here, everyone is more approachable and they notice and remember things.'*
>
> *'The managers watch out for the culture all the time, for example if someone is not coping they will move them and find them a more suitable role.'*

Senior managers believed the organisation was better at dealing with conflict than others, that it was better at coaching people and had a strong career development culture. They also

mentioned that the place had a family atmosphere and a high level of trust

'The community model is a fantastic tool to use in management. Its all about being open and honest in dealing with problems.'

4.4 A pick and mix approach

We also visited three other companies; a local council, a pharmaceutical company and a financial services company. All of them had a more eclectic approach to management development, offering a range of options, but they varied in terms of the degree of coherence they provided. Our pharmaceutical company offered a range of management development and leadership programmes with some core elements to them, including 360 degree feedback and action learning sets. They also offered a number of modular programmes, which provided specific skill sets. Coming from a more varied perspective, the local authority also had a wide range of courses on offer, and there was considerable autonomy with regard to departmental activity on management development. As a result, there was less cohesion to learning and development experiences, and different approaches were used by different programmes. The financial services company was looking to develop team leaders and had devised a modular training programme that team leaders could dip into as it suited them.

We were not able to speak with managers from all of these organisations, but the views of those we did speak to tended to reflect, not surprisingly, the degree of coherence or otherwise. Managers from the council who had attended a number of different kinds of events had mixed views on their value. Their overview of management development within the organisation was also less favourable. Interestingly, the issue is not one of lack of planning as there is an extensive top down process in place. From a council-side community plan, a corporate plan and a Best Value performance plan, each business unit creates a business plan, and an HR strategy is drawn from the corporate plan. What seemed to be missing was a common vision for development. One key programme was well received by managers but did not seem to be well integrated and indeed, their comments suggested cynicism about the culture for development, with colleagues unwilling to share skills, and hierarchies resistant to developing people.

'Most learning is on the job but its not best practice, it takes longer and people make mistakes. You seem to have to show yourself to be good before you can get help to be better. All of us want a space created for us to learn but on-the-job training doesn't give you the space you need.'

'If I go to a line manager with something that needs urgent attention I don't get a quick enough response. I may have to come back three or four times which means that I'm away from my job. I then have to deal with both staff and tenant complaints. All in all I have nine managers to deal with and sometimes I really feel like my hands are tied. My staff also get resentful about more senior management and I have to deal with this as well. The housing managers spend a lot of time in the office rather than dealing with me and my staff. It would be better if they visited once a week. My staff have great on-site knowledge and they could share this, but there is no contact between the lower staff levels, everything goes through me. Since the system became computerised, there is no personal contact within the office, people send emails to you even if you're at the next desk rather than talk to you.'

In this case the lack of a well planned development programme and the absence of a strong culture that favours development, meant that real change didn't happen.

4.5 Summary of lessons from cases

We have seen two examples of widespread and coherent programmes aimed at a specific management population, and an example of a carefully crated and cherished culture, which seeks to educate managers by cultural transmission. All three cases were successful to varying degrees in terms of their ability to change behaviour and create a common vision of what constitutes good management. There would appear to be real benefits from offering a common approach to development and applying a philosophical framework to it.

In the next chapter, we look at some of the emerging tensions for managers that make change difficult, and some emerging themes as to just what are the commonalties of good management.

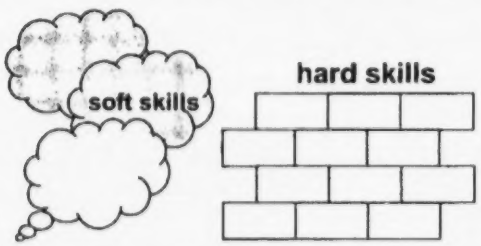
5. The Managers' Perspective: Key Tensions

Our interviews with managers within organisations and the discussions with providers, have identified some issues that are of common concern to managers seeking to come to terms with their people management role. One way of seeing these issues is as tensions between different views of management and different skill requirements. It is important to understand what skills managers themselves find especially challenging.

5.1 Role tensions

Three tensions need to be taken into account just in understanding how to develop managers for their role.

5.1.1 'Hard' versus 'soft' management style



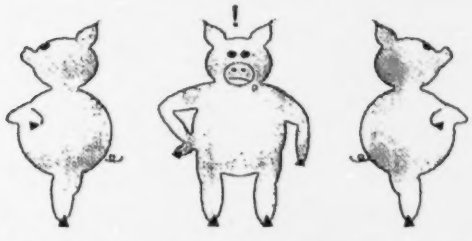
A large part of the management task is concerned with output – both personal output and ensuring that subordinates meet organisational goals and targets. This leads to a tendency to

emphasise what we might call a 'hard' or task oriented management style, that focuses on short-term results.

Increasingly however, managers are accountable for developing their staff and for achieving high levels of employee satisfaction and motivation. These are now often measured through staff attitude surveys and 360 degree feedback. Consideration of these 'softer' aspects of management leads naturally to an emphasis on a more participative and empowering management style.

The tension between these implied styles can lead managers to feel they are stuck between a rock and hard place as they struggle to develop this full range of skills and find the right balance in their deployment.

5.1.2 The manager as 'piggy in the middle'



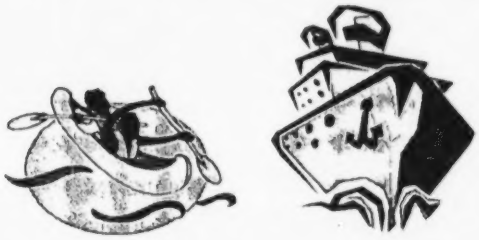
The second tension is about being stuck in the middle between irreconcilable perspectives. Senior managers may feel that middle managers act as the block in the organisation and fail to make change happen and, in doing so, fail to deliver the vision the senior team creates. Middle managers often see their more senior colleagues as very poor role models of the espoused leadership style. Indeed, research shows that senior managers are still too often cut off from upward feedback and not good learners themselves. For example, the more senior the manager the less likely they are to experience feedback or to be able to find the time for reflection (McCauley *et al.* 1995; Bartolome, 1989 in Baldwin and Padgett 1993).

So, middle managers may feel they are waiting to see good people management coming down from above before it becomes a reality. Meanwhile, employees below may feel that the organisation and their manager do not understand their

viewpoint. They hope and expect their manager will support them in times of conflict. This gives them that 'piggy in the middle' feeling.

Managers may feel that strategic HR also fails to support them. The function increasingly designs new performance management systems *etc.*, but on the whole managers do not find these helpful in managing performance. Endless variants of performance review documentation offer bureaucracy but do not support managers in dealing better with performance issues. Line managers would like more of a real partnership from personnel.

5.1.3 Focus on 'now' versus 'the future'



Linked to these, the third tension is about focusing on the present or the future. The pressures on performance can result in managers failing to delegate appropriately. There are fears as to whether they can trust people and hence managers tend to do too much themselves and not develop people appropriately. Often managers comment that they did not delegate appropriately until they were under such pressure themselves that they were forced to. Subordinates often see this behaviour as failure to be given enough responsibility.

For managers the tension is about concentrating on the here and now or investing in the future. How do they balance 'hands on' delivery against providing the coaching and support to help someone else to develop? The 'now versus future' tension also applies to innovation in approaches to work methods and processes.

5.2 The toughest skill challenges

Both managers and providers were clear about the specific areas of people management that provide the toughest challenges. Providers find these challenges are what managers want to talk about in group discussions and that they also influence the choices managers make when offered optional or alternative modules or sessions within a programme.

In general, the concerns of managers echo some of the issues voiced by employers. However, the concerns of managers are sometimes more specific and include:

- the giving of negative feedback in relation to the management of poor performers
- how to manage virtual or spatially scattered teams where the normal methods of personal interaction are problematic
- how to balance 'hard' and 'soft' leadership styles so as to motivate and retain at the same time as driving to achieve objectives
- how to cope when you are very busy, especially how to delegate when short of time to explain
- achieving work-life balance for themselves
- how to deal with conflict and organisational politics.

5.3 Barriers to effective people management

Managers tend to see such aspects of people management as one of the most stressful parts of their jobs. On the other hand, they are keen to acquire good people management skills, which they can take with them from one organisation to another and which add to their employability.

There are strong and consistent messages from managers about some of the things that constrain them in acting as effective people managers:

- lack of time to spend with subordinates and in discussion
- too many subordinates to attend to each one properly
- inadequate training in people management skills

- lack of support in this role from senior managers (who are often not good role models) and from HR (who can seem remote)
- lack of wider organisational emphasis on this role because the main performance metrics are still output-based and do not reward or acknowledge attention to people management.

On this last issue, some business schools are aware of companies trying to implement a balanced scorecard approach to performance, especially at board level. If one indicator used at this level is 360 degree or staff survey feedback on effective leadership, it can impact the behaviour of senior people. Other companies are seeking to measure human capital, an approach that also places greater emphasis on people management.

5.4 Managers' views on good people management

This project has looked at various perspectives on the people management part of a managers' job, and the different ways in which organisations are seeking to develop better people managers. The case studies asked managers and their subordinates what they thought made a good people manager. These views echo and augment the literature on leadership and management summarised earlier. Some remarkably common themes emerged from all levels in our case studies.

5.4.1 Connected

Good people managers have an eye on the organisation as well as on their own area and their direct subordinates. These managers understand that their job is part of a much greater whole. They need to network with others around them; share with colleagues; learn from the experiences of others; understand how their work and the work of those they manage impacts on others; have a sense of customer and community; and acknowledge their responsibilities to the wider organisation. Such managers are not just well connected and sociable, they are also responsible, they act on behalf of the organisation and do not avoid their obligations to the community.

5.4.2 Interested in people

Good people managers view their staff as individuals and enjoy getting to know them. They find the time to communicate with their staff, to set objectives, to ensure staff are motivated, have an appropriate workload *etc*. These managers understand that they are responsible for others and have a vital role to play in ensuring their contribution to the organisation. These managers manage performance through creating a vision, setting objectives, reviewing performance and giving feedback on a regular basis. Such managers celebrate success and let people know when they have done well. They are visible and approachable, they manage face to face and, above all, they find the time to make things happen.

5.4.3 Manage performance and conflict

Perhaps more than anything else, good people managers deal with difficult things. These are the managers who don't let bad situations develop, or let marginal performance become unacceptable and they don't hold back in the hope that situations will right themselves. They measure what they believe to be important and keep the focus on those things. They say the difficult thing, they react if they see unacceptable behaviour, they follow up issues. They are emotionally courageous because very few people like confrontation or relish difficult situations. These managers understand that this is part of their role and that things rarely improve by themselves.

5.4.4 Change agents

Good people managers also take their areas of responsibility by the scruff of the neck and make things happen with their people. They don't coast and they don't let the status quo prevail long past its sell by date. These are the change agents who see what needs doing and have the energy and commitment to do it. They don't need to be told, or to be driven by a major change programme; they are constantly open to ways in which their area of activity could be improved or ways in which it might be kept up to date. Neither do they wait for permission to do so or feel somehow inhibited from making change happen. Of course, part of this is cultural. If an organisation is highly unionised such that

any changes have to be agreed and approved, or highly centralised such that all change comes from the centre, then better managers will find it more difficult to operate, but most of them find a way. Partly this is about having a vision of what you want to achieve and where you want to go. Vision does not always have to involve grand schemes.

5.4.5 Democratic and empowering

Good people managers encourage their staff to take responsibility for their areas of work. They delegate well, making sure people have the resources to achieve the task, but allowing them some headroom and using work opportunities to give people full responsibility for the whole or as much of the whole as possible. They are also developers, using work to grow people, finding opportunities that challenge people and providing the practical and emotional support that enables them to succeed. These managers trust people and give them the freedom they need to grow.

5.4.6 True to themselves

Good people managers have to believe in what they do, to be credible to those they lead. Doing the right thing is probably not enough, if underneath you don't believe in it. Being enthusiastic about others, being empowering and positively managing diversity all require a degree of energy and commitment that is difficult to sustain if you don't believe in it. People sense a lack of integrity quickly and, on the whole, you have to believe what you say on the inside to be convincing on the outside.

6. Twin Tracks to Better People Management

This report has outlined what the various stakeholders see as the issues involved in improving people management. We have defined what it means to be a good people manager, some of the tensions and barriers faced by managers in meeting this challenge, and some of the practical approaches to management development that organisations are using to improve the people management skills of their management and leadership populations.

In this concluding chapter, we examine alternative strategies to raising the quality of people management, and turning managers from those who see it as a 'chore' to those who are really 'champions' of people management.

Of course, there are always managers who seem to develop appropriate leadership styles almost automatically. They tend to stand out and create role models, but there may not be very many of them and not enough to impact on those for whom 'better' behaviours come less naturally. Organisations need enough managers behaving in the ways we have described above for those approaches to become natural and normal. At this critical mass, even less able managers will start to behave in better ways as the norm of management behaviour is raised and becomes self-sustaining. Most organisations, however, are not in the lucky position of being in this steady state. When organisations want to improve management capability, they have two distinct choices in ways to encourage managers to become better. They can:

1. develop their managers so that they can in turn change the culture of management within the organisation.
2. try to act directly on the culture of the organisation and expectations of managers, and use this as a lever to change the behaviour of managers.

6.1 Using management development to change culture

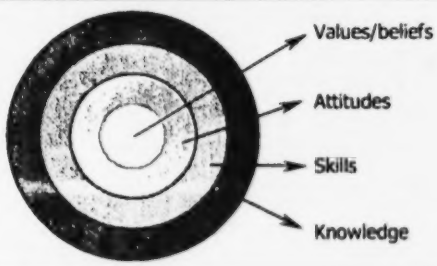
We have seen examples of development programmes that appear to have had considerable personal impact, and those that have also had visible impact from the perspective of others. We have also seen some programmes that would seem to have had, in comparison, relatively little impact on participants. The message from some of the development programmes was that managers could change their behaviour only if they get sufficient support.

We turn now to consider the characteristics of those development programmes that would seem to have some effect.

6.1.1 There are no shortcuts to behaviour change

Shifting behaviour is difficult for people. The more embedded it is the more difficult it is to shift. In thinking about the aspects of human performance it is useful to consider three domains of experience illustrated below:

Figure 6.1: Domains of human performance



Source: IES 2003

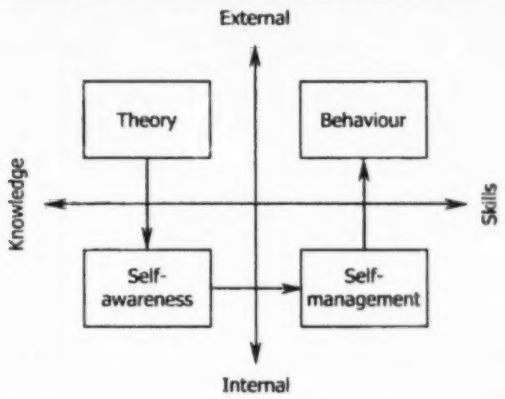
- the Heart — values, personality and attitude
- the Body — skills
- the Mind — knowledge.

In fact, these might be thought of as layers of human attributes, with the innermost layers being the most firmly embedded and the most difficult to change. The deeper into these layers the training and/or development is intended to penetrate, the more personal the learning experience.

We might like to consider people operating at these different levels of complexity. At the surface is knowledge, easily acquired and the easiest attribute to access. Then there are skills, the interplay between explicit and tacit knowledge, sometimes containing elements of motor ability, sometimes utilising interpersonal understanding. Skills are somewhat harder to acquire, they often require trial and error to perfect and are more difficult to access. Deeper still lie attitudes, the ways in which we approach things, and which are generally felt to be more difficult to change. Finally at the deepest level are the values and beliefs of individuals, which are relatively durable over our lifespan. Change at this level is often transformational and brought about by some kind of major experience or life event. The problem for management development is that the surface layers of behaviour build on what lies beneath. We have suggested that organisations don't just want people to act differently, they want them to behave with integrity and believe what they say. If we want to change people at their most inner level, it is even harder and the development takes not just time but energy too.

There is another way of thinking about these different aspects of development that may also be helpful. There is evidence from this and other research that learning about self may be valuable to making lasting changes to individuals. Some of the development that had most impact contained elements of learning about self, *ie* about management style, internal barriers to action and motivations to behaviour. Such perspectives can be expressed as the differences between internal and external knowledge and skills (see Figure 6.2). Changing soft skills behaviour requires change in the inner layers of human attributes. It requires external knowledge to be internalised and a translation from knowing about something to how it is done.

Figure 6.2: The relationship between internal and external knowledge and skills



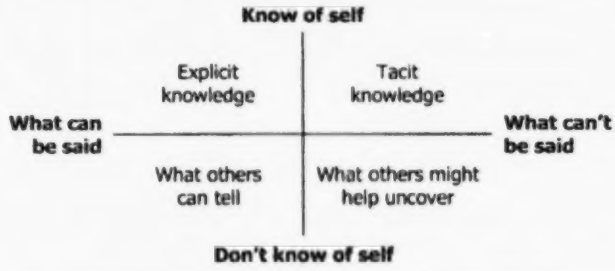
Source: IES 2003

6.1.2 Change needs feedback

People do not just change, they need some sense of where they are relative to where they want to be. They may not always be their own best measure and they will benefit from the perspectives of others. There is some evidence that poor performers are least able to assess their own performance (Carless and Roberts-Thompson, 2001), and multiple perspectives may be more influential than single. Previous research by IES (Tamkin and Barber, 1998) indicated that the most successful management development programmes included feedback to participants. This feedback can be direct from mentors or coaches or through action learning sets, or can be indirect from 360 degree review systems. The important thing is that it has the power to bring to the attention of individuals that which they did not know about themselves and give them the impetus to make change. The distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1983) *'We know more than we can say'* may be helpful here. This throws into question exactly what it is others can challenge and help individuals to become aware of.

If this is also applied to the knowledge individuals may possess about themselves it may form an interesting adaptation of the Johari window (Jongeward and Sayer 1978), *ie* the dimensions of

Figure 6.3: Ability to articulate knowledge about ourselves



Source: IES 2003

that which we know about ourselves and that which others know about 'us', related to that which **we can possibly know** about ourselves and that **which we can possibly articulate**. In this conception, others can only help individuals discover that which can be articulated in verbal ways (see Figure 6.3). Perhaps individuals are helped, in part, by others making explicit their tacit knowledge and thereby making it more usable.

In this research we have seen two examples of development programmes involving feedback those building on action learning sets and those from executive coaches coupled with a 360 degree review.

6.1.3 Provide support

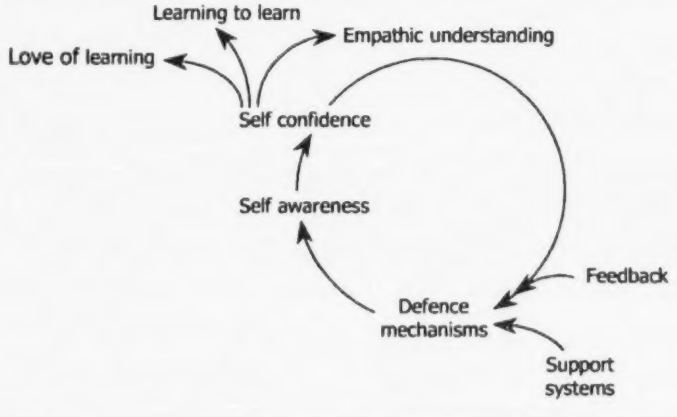
Feedback can be of enormous value but only if recipients are ready to listen. It is often said that those most in need of feedback are those with the worst hearing. Individuals may choose not to listen where they feel most threatened, where the feedback may damage their self-esteem. This puts us in a 'catch 22' situation as much research has shown that those with the highest self-esteem are most likely to learn from a developmental event (Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Warr *et al.*, 1999). So how do organisations preserve self-esteem whilst getting people to listen to potentially difficult information about themselves?

The answer, it seems, is to provide social and emotional support. Those who receive feedback in a supportive environment are much more likely to listen and to act on it. This support can be

provided through peer groups, as in the action learning sets, or by a supportive individual, as in the executive coaching programme. The important thing is that a safe environment is created that enables individuals to consider criticism and think about what to do about it.

Important processes are at work here. Self-esteem and learning are locked in a mutually reinforcing relationship, where self-knowledge is able to provide the external momentum that enables this relationship to form a positive feedback loop. Previous IES research indicates that it is the increasing confidence of the individual that makes them receptive to feedback opportunities, to the extent that they will both seek them out but also utilise such feedback to change themselves. This research has shown that feedback works best (at least initially) if provided in a supportive environment that enables individuals to accept and consolidate that feedback into their self-perceptions. This support can be provided effectively by a social group of fellow learners who become learning helpers, supporting the individual to become aware of aspects of themselves that they were previously unaware of. It can also be provided by a learning coach or mentor. These helpers boost the self-esteem of individuals in the face of the potentially damaging impact of uncomfortable feedback. This ensures that feedback is

Figure 6.4: Impact of self-confidence on feedback acceptance



Source: IES 2003

positively used to understand self better and hence enhance self-esteem (See Figure 6.4).

6.1.4 Make it relevant

There has been much said about the difficulties of transferring learning from a developmental event to the workplace. The evidence shows that there are a number of individual and organisational factors that help transfer. The transfer climate and the organisation's culture have been shown to have significant impact. For example, Warr *et al.* (1999) found that changes in job behaviour were predicted by the transfer climate and learning confidence. The degree to which an individual's expectations about the training are met also has a significant impact (Holton, 1996), as does job involvement and autonomy.

The successful events took considerable care to ensure that development was firmly embedded in the workplace. The North West Health Board not only had action learning sets to ensure that participants grounded their learning and development in the day- to-day, but also had projects through which participants could apply the skills they were learning to make change happen at work. Within DTLR, the executive coaches were helping individuals consider what they would like to do differently within the workplace. Our local government case study had a range of development options but did not manage to achieve this kind of coherence across all of them, and there were no specific ways of embedding training within work. As a consequence, transfer seemed to be less successful.

6.1.5 Building and maintaining momentum

Development isn't easy and as we have seen, it requires long-term and sustained effort. Meanwhile, the work environment makes huge demands on individuals. All of the organisations we visited had to cope with heavy workloads and periods of stress and overload. All of our managers commented on how difficult it was to get the job done within the time available, and time management was a concern specifically addressed within the development programmes of two of our case studies. In these environments it is all too easy not to sustain development effort and to return to old ways of behaving and doing things. Yet we saw some examples where this was not the case, and where

individuals had both journeyed in terms of their development and were also behaving very differently at work. The features of the development programmes that enabled this to happen appeared to be a sense of building momentum, creating high energy levels and making fun a key ingredient of learning. Those who were participating in the North Western Health Board programme were universally enthusiastic about what they had achieved and the fun they had. The secret? A high energy start, building strong social networks that add the joy of friendship to that of learning, and the use of creative approaches such as using art, theatre, and metaphors to add and maintain energy and enthusiasm.

6.1.6 Reach out

The most successful development programmes do not hide away in the recesses of the organisation and involve only a select group. They engage with lots of people. This is especially important in management programmes that are designed to reach and transform the behaviours of middle managers. Once a group of people behave in similar ways it is much easier to sustain and much easier to inculcate the behaviour in others. Some organisations try a wide range of development events, which may have the advantage of at least some hits a kind of shotgun approach. The disadvantage is that this does not allow the development of a critical mass of individuals thinking and behaving in the same way.

6.1.7 Work to a goal

Know what you want to be different, know what you want to achieve, know how you want your managers to be. There is much said about diversity in management style and the need for managers to behave in different ways in different situations. Competency frameworks have occasionally been criticised for setting too rigid a view as to how managers should behave. That may be true, but it is also true that on the whole, subordinates like the kinds of behaviours that we have already spelt out. Being clear on what helps determine successful management or what you would like to be different, gives development programmes a chance of success. Interestingly, the case studies did not adopt a strict competency route but did use the frameworks of 360

degree feedback, or the broader belief in meta skills such as critical thinking, self-confidence and initiative to structure their approach. More specifically, programmes can cover some generic skills such as time management and dealing with conflict.

6.2 Using culture to improve people management

Having explored some of the difficulties in making change through the successful leverage of development, it may seem that the easier option is to let the organisational culture change people. We had one case study where it was not development that made the difference but an embedded culture of the organisation given voice through the behaviours of everyone in the organisation.

Once such a culture exists it might seem to be self-sustaining, socialising newcomers into the right way to do things and fighting back against transgressions. But our research suggests that as much as getting development right requires enormous effort, so getting culture right and keeping it that way does too. It has been said that we tend to adopt behaviours that are frequently unhealthy (*eg* Argyris and Schon, 1978, 1996). These negative behaviours tend to be universal and appear to reflect certain human tendencies, such as the desire to avoid confrontation and save 'face', both our own and that of others. As a consequence, individuals tend to not speak the truth when they feel it will be unwelcome, and have possible dire results for the organisation as a whole. If these behaviours are more natural than those we hope to engender, it is clear that the right culture needs to be safeguarded. Just what are the lessons from the case studies as to how this might be done?

6.2.1 Promote at every opportunity

Culture is expressed in many different ways, and benefits arise from reminding people of it regularly. Whether it be memos, notices, briefings, team meetings, get-togethers, the way the organisation deals with reward, promotion, selection, performance issues, terms and conditions, each can be a statement with a message.

At Sportasia there are some clear cultural statements that govern the way the organisation does things, its policies and procedures.

These are underpinned by unambiguous values that are far from invisible. The values form part of group and organisation-wide meetings, are clearly expressed in leaflets, form the core of briefing sessions and are frequently reviewed.

6.2.2 Create champions

Whilst in a sense culture is owned by everyone and all have a role in living and safeguarding it, it is also true that it benefits from a few high profile champions – individuals who visibly live the culture and are in sufficient positions of responsibility to ensure others do too. These champions play an important role in regularly giving a boost to the organisation, keeping everyone on their toes and reminding them of their responsibility. In Sportasia both the managing director who created the company and the HR manager were clear champions for the organisation's values.

6.2.3 Believe in it

Cynicism and apathy are enemies of cultures that aim to respect everyone and value their contribution. Such cultures depend on people believing that they too have responsibilities to the organisation, that they have to treat colleagues with respect and that they have to genuinely give their best efforts to the organisation. In many organisations there are those who, for whatever reason, are not committed to their jobs, the organisation, their managers or those around them. Such individuals can undermine positive culture and team behaviour, they are difficult to manage, frequently look to take shortcuts, tend to do no more (and frequently somewhat less) than is needed and can create friction and dispute within organisations. Trust is essential for cultures of mutual respect and is destroyed by cynical approaches. This type of approach can be a problem at any level in the organisation, but at senior levels it can be especially destructive.

In many organisations, junior people question the motives of senior management. They often feel that managers do not really believe in the behaviours they espouse, and do not display those behaviours themselves. Walking the talk is seen to be a key management attribute. As we have already noted, acting with integrity is key; it is very difficult to convincingly maintain behaviour that you do not believe in.

6.2.4 Select for it

Such cultures do not suit everyone. They make considerable demands on those who work within the organisation. Ensuring that the right people are recruited to embed the culture is both acceptable to them, and to make sure it is cared for, is very important. Sportasia put enormous efforts into recruiting the right people, much more so than other organisations might consider reasonable. Their view was that it was much better to put this effort in at the recruitment stage than to try and deal with the consequences later.

7. Conclusions

There are no easy routes, speedy solutions or quick fixes to creating effective people managers. This will undoubtedly be a disappointment to those who might hope to identify the magic route to better management, the ideal performance management system or the great management development course. The evidence from this research is that management skills remain a key concern for many organisations. They experience considerable difficulty in developing appropriate skills for the mass of managers in the organisation, and they are frequently struggling to balance effective development with resourcing constraints (Hirsh and Carter, 2002). Providers also note the shift towards participative and personal approaches for senior managers and the difficulty in extending them to the larger populations of middle and junior managers.

From our case studies and discussions we have seen that there are certain skills that organisations look for in their management population. These are:

- being connected, *ie* an eye on the organisation as well as their personal area of responsibility
- being interested in people, with genuine active engagement with those they manage
- being able to manage performance and conflict and being willing to deal with difficult things
- being ready to act as change agents, using initiative to change their area of responsibility and make things better
- democratic and empowering leadership, developing those they work with and helping them perform better
- acting with integrity.

Our case studies had all invested heavily in creating the appropriate learning environment to encourage better management capability, especially in the people management aspect of the role. How they do so varies considerably, but we have distilled certain key factors that encourage successful development and other factors that are essential for maintaining a supportive and beneficial environment.

We have seen that management development needs to make the link between theory and practice – something that can bridge the gap between what we learn of the outside world and how we use that to shift our own individual behaviour. Good management development utilises feedback to help people see where they need to develop. It also needs to support them in making positive use of this new perspective. Development needs to be embedded in the workplace so it can be applied to the job. It needs to reach out to many rather then touch a few, and it needs to be clear what behaviours it expects people to develop.

For other organisations, a cultural approach may work. If there are already positive traditions with regard to people management, if there is a common vision of what the organisation should be like, or if the organisation wants to take a more holistic approach, then a cultural perspective may be more powerful than a development approach. Successfully embedding such a culture needs the will, the stamina and the energy to promote steadily and to repeat the culture in many ways so it is reflected in all aspects of organisational life. Such cultures also benefit from the existence of clear champions who can be relied on to act in ways that will safeguard the changes and to watch out for potential problems. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges is to avoid cynicism, which acts as a slow poison to a positive culture, through timely management action and welcoming challenge and openness of debate of issues. Critically, it also needs the right people and therefore requires considerable investment in selection and promotion.

In presenting these contrasting alternatives, we may have implied that there are two alternative routes for organisations to follow – utilising development to shift the culture of management within the organisation or utilising the organisational culture to create an appropriate environment for development. However, it is likely to be that success depends on neither one nor the other

but elements of both. It is likely that there is synergy between management learning, as one element of creating better management, and the creation of an organisational culture that increasingly supports it. We have seen from our case studies that one without the other may fail unless active steps are taken to provide support, and there is plenty of evidence that supportive cultures aid learning.

The message for organisations is perhaps that it doesn't matter where you start. Backed by energy and commitment, both paths will lead you to the same place.

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